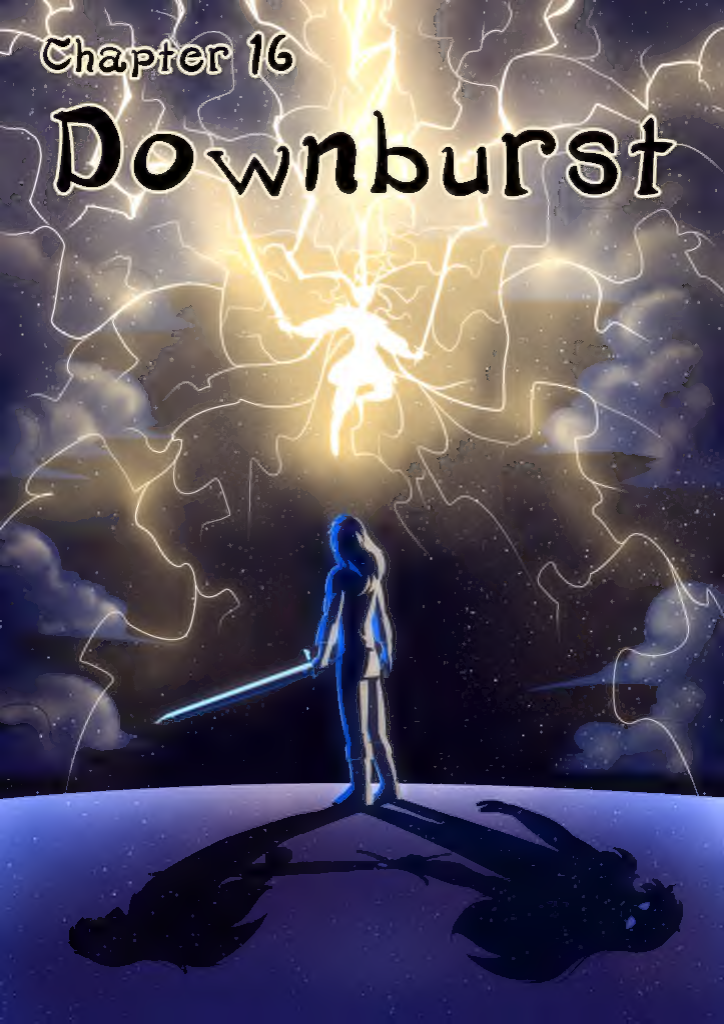
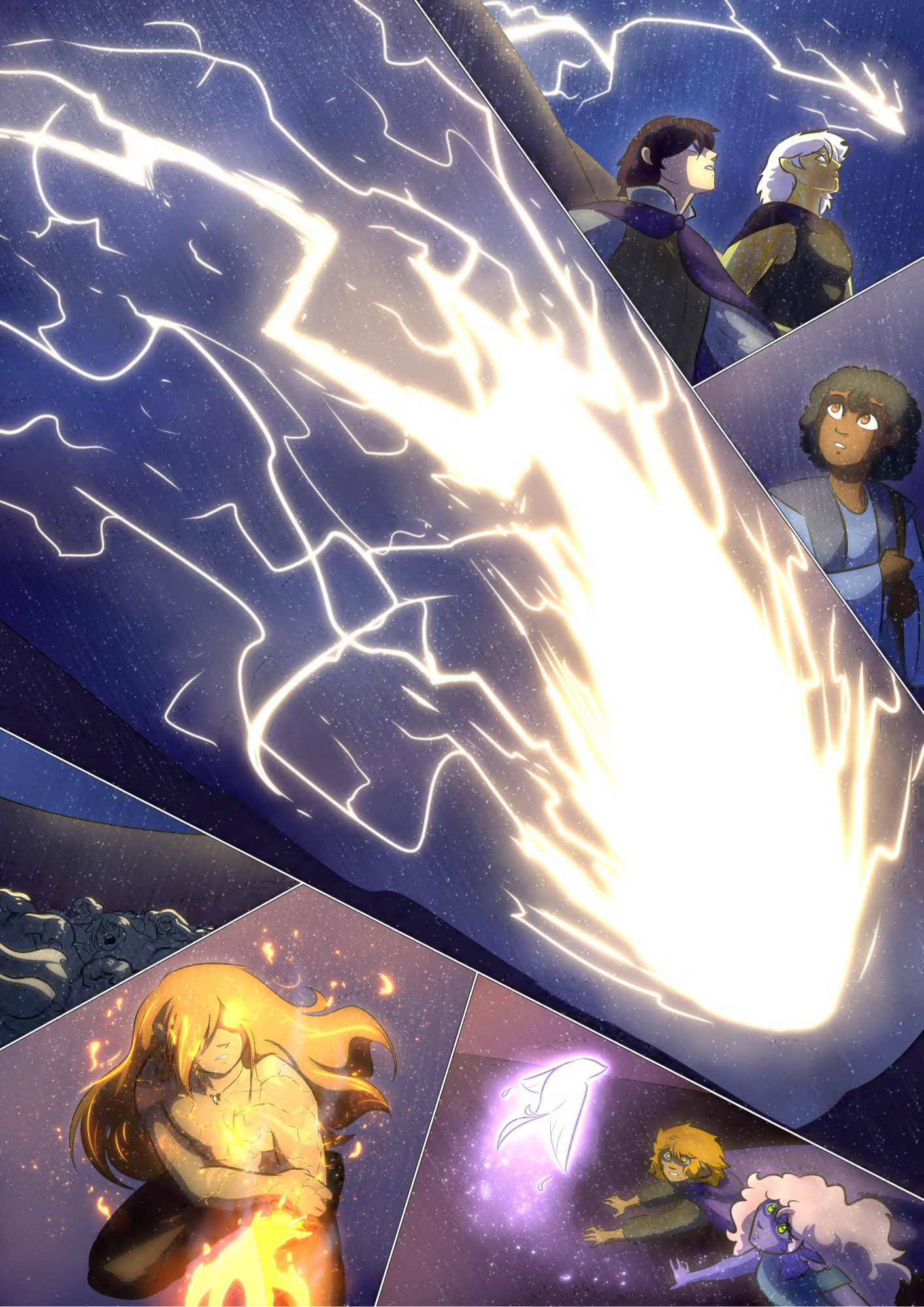

Chapter 16
Downburst



So that's what he did with the starmetal.
Not a bad piece of work.
In the right hands, it might even be able to stop me again.
But your hands aren't his anymore, are they?
It's nothing but a hunk of metal to you.
Do you really think
CHRRP
Ah.
All right, then.
To business.

Good.
KRICK KRACK
VERY good.
KA-TA-NG!
You're not nearly as fragile as I feared.
If this were over quickly, the impact would be lost.
You're going to last just long enough to wring every last drop of hope out of them.
SKFF

It's going back!
It followed the lightning.
Kendal-!
The storm must've gotten to him first.
Come on!
Wait!
GAH
EXCUSE you!
Kendal can at least protect himself. He's got time the city doesn't.
It's going to flood.
What? What are you-?
All those people trapped underground-
They'll never clear the prison in time.
I can give them a chance to escape to higher ground.
You pick NOW to start taking my advice?!
Cover me.
We're cracking the mountain open.

What's going on?
ACOLYTE
Ah!
Lady Niluca?
The archive is in danger!
Return as quickly as you can!
The vault will be ready when you arrive!
Alinva-
I know. But if I let anyone die for him, he'd never forgive me.
I wouldn't either.

Everyone remain calm!
Please exit carefully-
And proceed to higher ground immediately!
can you
end it?
This chump?
Not a chance.

wh
I've seen soulfire burn at the bottom of the ocean.
A little rain won't kill you. It won't even sting.
you
how
I see. You're too conflicted to hold together right now.
We've gotta bring your temperature down or you'll end up brittle.
Deep breath.
Let's start with the fury.
Staying in that prison was burning you up. You've built up quite a reservoir of rage in there.
Swallowing your pride every day to protect those people from your fire.
Breathe it out.
huff huff
Great! You're a natural!
Let's move on to the guilt!

You
I'm sorry!
About attacking the divine blade!
No, not that guilt!
The other stuff!
See, rage is a fire that burns indiscriminately.
It makes a very useful weapon if you aim it right.
Guilt, though?
Guilt burns YOU. Nothing else.
If I'm not mistaken, guilt burned out your eye.
If you temper yourself in the fires of self-hatred, you'll burn down to nothing.
We can't have that, can we?
Why not?
I hurt people who trusted me.
If I burn, I can't hurt them anymore.
If you burn, how can you help them?

Stop-
Guilt is heavier than rage. You can't breathe it out.
But that's okay. We'll get rid of it another way.
Deep breath.
This time, we're going to let the fire do what it does best. We're going to let it change you.
Change-?
Are you afraid? You did something you hate. Do you want to do it again?
Never!
I was - I was selfish, desperate -
I sacrificed someone who'd done nothing to hurt me!
And when I hurt him, I let it make me angrier-
When he wouldn't even fight back!
And now you're not the person who'd do that anymore.
Well done.

I-
You-
How do you feel?
...The fire's still there, isn't it?
Just under the skin.
Of course.
You're a Crucible. You ARE the fire.
You know what this is.
You could say that.
I-!
I... don't have time to ask the questions I need to.
Just one question.
"Soulfire."
Think of somewhere you'd rather be?
Constantly.
Can it burn a god?
CRACK

I don't think he's feeling these.
If you don't think of something soon, I'm gonna walk into that tornado and try punching his body.
Don't you dare!
Fighting his body is pointless if we can't stop the storm itself!
If Kendal really is in there, he's buying us time to figure out how to do that!
Well, figure faster, please.
I'll feel bad if your friend dies before we've been introduced.
On paper, there are many ways I could stop a storm.
I could force it back with water magic. Hold every raindrop perfectly suspended, never coalescing into a flood.
Until my concentration wavered and the water fell all at once.
Perhaps I could use stone magic to reshape the valley itself, redirecting the flood away from the city, but the avalanches that would trigger would crush Zuurith faster than Tynan ever could.
Wind magic could simply push it away from the city - if Tynan's will weren't pushing it right back.
Every option that isn't futile just dooms the city faster.
I'm frozen.
Useless.
Frozen...

Whoop!
My mistake. He's feeling them, they're just not hurting him.
Any luck back there?
Erin?
Brute force is too slow.
Let's try something he can't fight.

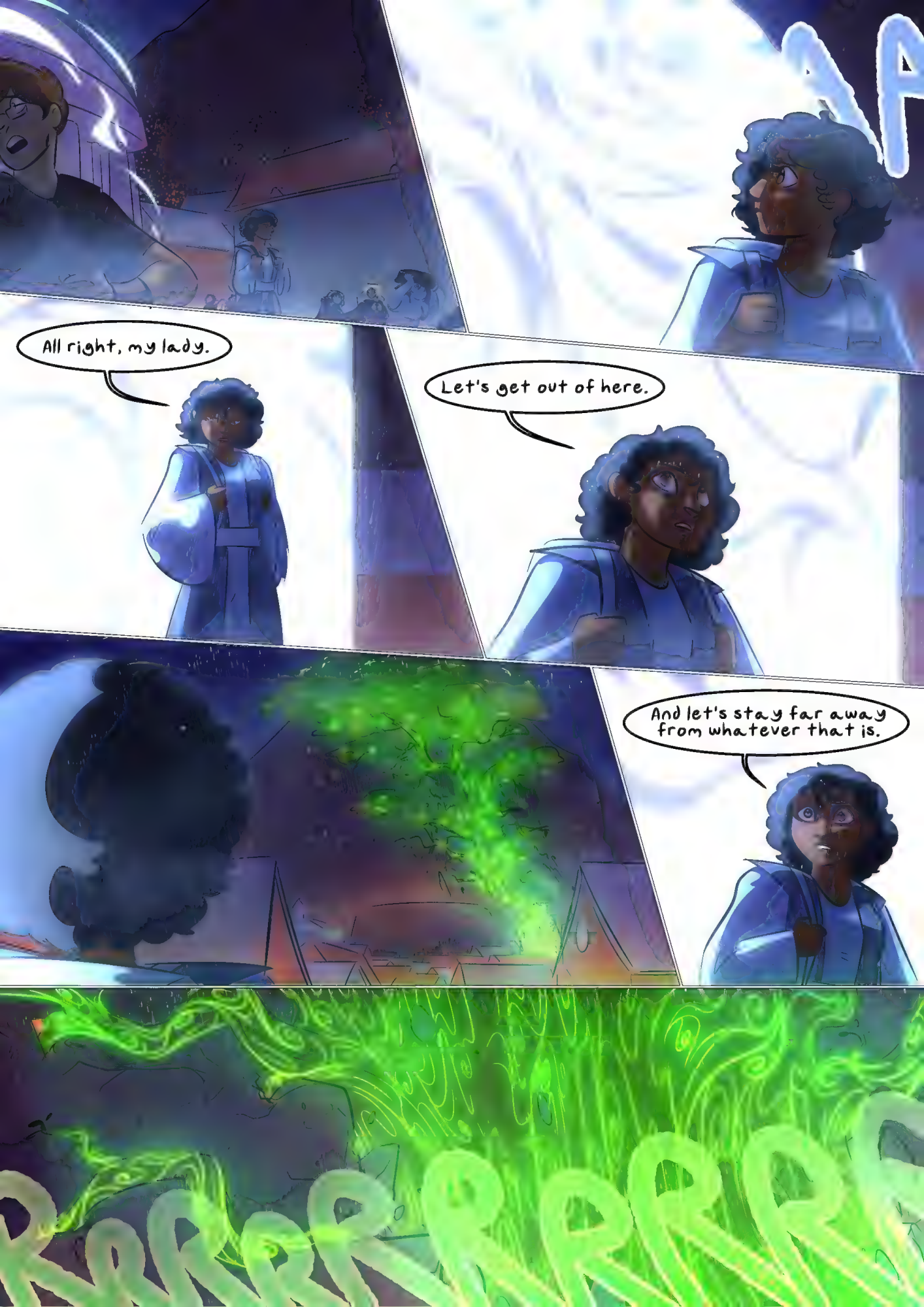
We'll take the east road up the slope before-
Wait!
YOU!
What are you doing to my prison?!
YOUR prison?
What are YOU doing?!
The storm's turning that hole into a deathtrap!
You're not even TRYING to get them out in time?!
Don't lecture me, beast!
You - stop her!
She's doing YOUR job, you spineless bureaucrat.
Out of the way.
I don't know how you people keep surprising me.
You already buried them alive.
GUARDS!
Of COURSE you'd leave them to rot.

It's too slow.
Come on.
Come on.
Please.
I know you can hear me.
These people need us. Nobody else is coming.
But it's... so heavy, and I- I'm just...
...I don't think I can do this in time.
But you can.
I know you can.
I'm yours, right?
You can save them! Just use me!
NO.

"No?"
What...
What do you WANT from me?!
CRACK
CRACK
RRRR

Get back!
What are you fools doing?!
Go after him!
Slow down!
You're gonna get buried!
She won't help me.
But she won't let me die, either.
These people don't have that luxury, and neither do you.
Go.
Just get them out safely.
I'll keep the rocks off you.
Falst-
Do it!
Stow the crisis and think it through!
You're a healer, I'm just hard to hurt!
Which of us do you think Kendal's gonna need more?!

Lady Niluca!
Acolyte! Good, good!
That overgrown squall is endangering the whole valley. We have to seal the archive as soon as possible.
Citizens are evacuating up the eastern slope. Go with them, for now, but if the situation gets worse, head south instead.
Even if The Archive falls, The Vault must survive.
Are you sure I should be the one doing this?
Positive, child.
You haven't been Junior Archivist very long, but this is one of the duties of the role.
Come on.
The Vault is an Ancient relic that contains a volume far greater than the dimensions of its shell. It stores older copies of every text in the Archive.
They're fragile, but legible.
The shell is watertight when closed, so keep it closed at all times during the storm.
We have to put up the barriers as soon as you leave.
I wish... I wish we could send someone with you, but...
I know. It's all right.
But you will never be alone and you will never be unprotected. Remember that.
I will.


All right, my lady.
Let's get out of here.
And let's stay far away from whatever that is.
RRRRR

Great view, right?
You've got a funny definition of "nudge".
Like you're one to talk. You got him all riled up before the fight, didn't you?
You mean how I heated your material so you could smith it into shape?
All right, all right. Point taken.
On that note-
Pull yourself together already!
Sheesh. Embarrassing.
Just leave him. We got what we needed.
I know. It just seems like such a waste.
He's acting like it's the end of the world.

CRACK
Hm.

You know, it's the strangest thing.
I have a feeling you're not taking this entirely seriously.
Vash was desperate to protect his people.
So was Zuurith, though he wasn't any good at it.
And mortals, as a rule, are desperate to survive.
So, in the face of certain death...
Why are you
so
calm?
NO!

YOU.
You... arrogant little splinter!
You really-
You actually think you can WIN!
ROOOR

POK
KRRRRR
There.
Alinua?
Tell me we're close.
We're close.
CRACK

Whoa! You-
RRRRRR
Gnn!
THUMP
RUMR
You did it.
Now's your chance! Apprehend them at
WHY ARE YOU STILL HERE

What's going on?
Who did this?
What are you waiting for, nicer weather?!
GO!
CLACK
Go. Go!
Clear the upper levels!
Oh man, are we under arrest?
Sure hope you don't put us in prison.
We're well past that, beast.
My city is crumbling. My god has deserted me.
You damage my dominion and foment rebellion in my prisoners.
You have robbed me of order -
-but I have not yet lost control!

WHACK
WHUD
Any objections?
Good.
If you all want order, help with the evacuation.
People are panicking. They need direction.
Are you all right? Can you stand?
...We're fine.
You're not fine. That arm looks bad. Let me-
No!
snow...?
Our friend is out there fighting the storm. We can't waste any more time!
Your friend-?
You're right. We need to move.

"We"?
Come on!
Hold on!
Why are YOU coming?!
You done?
Yes.
I've cooled the air over the city so the rain has frozen into snow. It won't stick, but it'll delay the flood risk significantly.
I've bought us the time we need to deal with him directly.
Nice.
A tree broke the prison.
A-?
So that's why Alinva's taking so long.
She was serious about that "stone by stone" thing?

All right, enough fooling around. We need to attack him directly.
I'm thinking a few hundred more of these and he might get the picture.
Maybe.
But let's not reinvent the wheel.
We already know how to hurt him.
Storms form when the gaseous form of water found naturally in the air is exposed to the cold and becomes unstable, precipitating out into clouds and rain.
Freezing the air will change the precipitation and slow the flood, but it won't hurt the storm.
If we want him gone, we take a page out of Vash's playbook.
We burn him.

Not so easy, is it?
Vash endured for hours before he woke the starfire in that blade.
And he couldn't die.
What are you-?

Sorry I'm late.
Hi, Erin. How was the Archive?
How was the-?
Well, Kendal, I got a little sidetracked when the city was attacked by a storm god trying to murder you.
Oh. Sorry.
Oh, he's fun.
That won't keep him demanifested for long. You should go.
That would be rude. I just got here.
Erin-
Let me guess. This is god business and I shouldn't try to interfere?
How well did that work out for you last time?
Vash defeated Tynan with a brilliant burst of starfire, boiling the clouds apart.
And while I am more intrigued than anyone that you might possess the same ability, now is not the time to experiment.
Elemental fire will work just as well.
Incoming!
CRACK
And his tricks don't work so well when I'm here.

Oh, this is precious.
The little wizard thinks he can fight me.
Stay behind me.
Fight you?
Don't be ridiculous. I'm not a fighter.
And, more importantly, neither are you.
You're just dressed like one.
Swinging those ridiculous swords around in a whimpering plea for attention.
If you WERE a fighter, I wouldn't need to be here. Kendal would've beaten you fair and square.
But I suspect you don't like fair fights.
You're not a warrior, a king, or any of the things you style yourself after.
You're just a problem.
I'm not going to fight you.
I'm going to solve you.

Then die trying.
CRACK
Oh, really?
You really think HE stands a chance?!
Fine. Indulge his delusion.
You can't protect him forever.
THERE you are!
You can't even protect yourself.
CRACK

Erin?
I'm a little busy right now.
Who is that?
Oh, her? That's my sister, Tess.
Now where'd you run off to?
But, more pertinently, she's Metal-caste, chosen by the sky.
With a profound connection to the element of Lightning -
There's no-one more deserving of the legendary title Stormbreaker.
And no-one better equipped to buy me the time I need.
KLOOM